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Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Letter dated 3 September 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that a Forum on Emerging Democracies, in which 16 countries participated, met in Sana'a from 27 to 30 June 1999. The Forum adopted the Sana'a Declaration, a copy of which is enclosed (see annex).

Accordingly, I would like to request circulation of the declaration as a document of the General Assembly, under item 39 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Abdalla S. **Al-Ashtal**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Sana'a Declaration, adopted by the Forum on Emerging Democracies on 30 June 1999

We, who participated in the Forum on Emerging Democracies held at Sana'a, Yemen, from 27 to 30 June 1999, representing 16 countries, met to acknowledge our democratic achievements, to address common challenges we face in the transition to full democracy and to reaffirm our commitment to democratic rights and principles. The Forum was a unique gathering, bringing together a diverse group of participants and countries whose democratic advances are less well-known.

We recognize that the transition process is not complete and that much needs to be done to consolidate our democratic systems and to implement further political and economic reforms. While we are proud to have joined the growing community of democracies, the international community has tended to focus on countries that are considered strategically more important or are in crisis. However, democratic progress in our States contributes to peace, stability and prosperity both within and beyond our borders.

Reflecting the importance of all sectors of society in this endeavour, the participants at the Forum included government officials, members of governing and opposition parties, and representatives of labour, business and civic groups from Benin, Bolivia, El Salvador, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Malawi, Mali, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Yemen. We represent a diversity of democratic experience, but our attendance at this Forum demonstrates the universality of the democratic idea. This group of nations with different traditions, cultures and historical experiences was brought together by a shared commitment to democracy and a belief that the promise of economic prosperity enjoyed by all citizens is more likely to be realized in a democratic political environment based on respect of human rights, popular participation and the rule of law. Further, we share a commitment to:

- Pursue economic reforms and secure fundamental workers' rights, while making every effort to educate and build widespread consensus for these goals;
- Improve protection for human rights for all our people;
- Hold regular free and fair elections, with special attention to the need to build public confidence in the process;
- Develop our legislatures as an essential instrument for broad public participation and representation as well as for policy debate and oversight of government;
- Empower democratic governance at local levels;
- Deepen our commitment to, and implement measures to ensure, the full participation of women in political life;
- Ensure that the rights of minorities are respected and that every effort is made to engage marginalized groups in the political system;
- Broaden the democratic experience by adopting all reasonable means to encourage public access to, and participation in, the policy-making process;
- Support the strengthening of civil society;
- Uphold the freedom of the press;
- Address the urgent challenge of corruption by instituting meaningful reforms, including those that increase governmental transparency, and
- Foster judicial independence, enhance public access to legal redress and ensure that the laws are fairly applied to all.

These are the principles that brought us to Yemen. We discussed them in the context of our specific experiences. Following are some examples or measures recommended by Forum participants that give concrete expression to our shared democratic principles.

The successful implementation of economic reforms is advanced by:

- Transparent and inclusive decision-making, the involvement of civil servants, the public labour, business groups and political parties in the design and implementation of reforms;
- A social safety net to meet basic human needs and/or a complementary poverty alleviation programme; and
- A recognition of the role of the civil sector in the implementation of economic reforms, including the use of such groups to help deliver government-funded social services.

Public confidence in elections is enhanced by:

- Working towards the establishment of independent election commissions that are non-partisan or politically balanced;
- Regulating by legislation, government financing of elections to ensure that they are fair and equitable for all parties;
- Inviting election observers, whether domestic or international, to mount more comprehensive efforts, including the monitoring of registration and campaign periods.

The legitimacy of parties and legislatures is advanced by:

- The adoption by political parties of internal democratic procedures, ongoing training of political leaders and elected officials, and public accountability and transparency;
- The implementation of legislative procedures that ensure public access to plenary and committee meetings, holding of public hearings and the provision of committee documents and bills to the public.

Public participation in democratic decision-making is enhanced by:

- Providing for private ownership of media and ensuring the impartiality of State-owned media through independent boards or other means;
- Ensuring that Governments and political parties take measures to increase the number of women in parliament and appoint women to key government posts;
- Conducting civic education in schools, non-governmental organizations, parties and the media to address cultural attitudinal and legal barriers to the political and economic participation of women;
- Encouraging Governments and legislatures to enhance the viability of non-governmental organizations, including removing legal barriers and providing tax-exempt status, and engaging non-governmental organizations in policy debates.

The achievement of good governance, the improvement of administration, controlling corruption and strengthening the rule of law can be advanced by:

- Instituting public information mechanisms, such as budget transparency, freedom-of-information laws and the publication of regulations;
- Depoliticizing and professionalizing the civil service;
- Implementing comprehensive anti-corruption commissions, ombudsmen and auditors general, codes of conduct and financial disclosure rules, and an open procurement process.

As a result of this conference, we hope to establish mechanisms between our countries to continue the sharing of ideas and experiences through consultations, exchange programmes, an interactive Web site and other means. We also look forward to working together in a variety of international forums to promote democratic principles and practices. We intend to support the efforts of other countries that are beginning the process of democratic transition.

The international community should renew its commitment to countries working to build democratic institutions and processes and dedicate the resources for this task. In particular, the donor community and the international financial institutions, in considering loans, aid and debt policy, should give priority to those countries implementing political as well as economic reforms. These political reforms would include measures that advance popular participation, build public trust in elections and legislatures, and enhance government transparency and accountability.